

Reverend Eldren Morrison
Varick Memorial AME Zion Church and Booker T. Washington Academy
Appropriations Committee Hearing
February 21, 2013

Good Evening Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee: I am Reverend Eldren Morrison, pastor of Varick Memorial AME Zion Church in New Haven, Connecticut, and I am here in support of the Governors' education budget proposal.

I'm the visionary of a grassroots effort to start a new public charter school in New Haven. Today I'm joined by board members and supporters who are deeply invested in the New Haven community and want more school choice available in urban communities.

As Pastor of a church that sits in what is known as 'the crime corridor' of New Haven, more than others, I see the need for more opportunities for our kids. Education where I live is a matter of life and death.

The demand is alarmingly high of parents who want high performing charter schools in their communities. Why? Because all New Haven charter schools are out-performing traditional public schools as reported by the State Department of Education. The waiting lists for Connecticut Charter schools are well over 5200 kids. In New Haven alone, 9000 families applied for 2000 choice seats. These numbers send a clear message that parents want choice because in underserved and disenfranchised communities, choice equals power.

Schools are anchors in our communities. When you have high performing schools where parents, teachers, and residents rally around and support it, the community is revitalized. And you would be hard pressed to find a charter school in Connecticut that is not largely supported by the neighborhood and parents whose children attend it.

Clearly my members and your voters are demanding more school choice for their children and charter schools are a proven high performing option in this state. People also understand that early childhood education is no longer an option but is a necessity. We need charter school that starts at the pre-k level for New Haven, especially in the community I serve.

Booker T. Washington said, "If you can't read it will be hard to realize your dreams."

That's even truer now as when he first said it. Sadly, today it's common to see a high school student reading at an elementary level. We are failing our students and we are destroying their futures. You can't dare a child to dream and deny them the quality education it will take for that dream to be realized. If we don't educate all of our children, they will not only suffer, our entire state will.

The reality where I live is very stark: we either do a better job educating kids today or I'll be burying them tomorrow.

Last year I came to the Capitol along with other clergy to urge you to support our communities through school reform, and thankfully this legislature made a promise that you would invest more into kids' education. In essence you wrote a check to fund more choices for parents, today we're asking you to cash it in and appropriate the funds to expand high quality charter schools in our communities.

A lot of people have written off communities like Dixwell and Newhallville where I serve, but we are here today as a community to fight for what's best for our kids. We have the vision for change, we ask that you stand by your word and support this budget.